



8th FullDome Festival Marked by Diversity and Mastery

With exactly 100 contributions from 20 nations, the 8th FullDome Festival at the Jena Zeiss Planetarium can once more claim to be the greatest international event of its kind. From May 22nd to 24th, 2014, the festival drew hundreds of media mavens from academia, planetarium staff, fulldome producers, artists, students, dealers and many people simply curious about the immersive medium of 360-degree dome projection. Attendees at the Jena Planetarium witnessed a multi-faceted demonstration of the present state of the expanding medium and its development trends. Fulldome stands for a variety of themes, among them education-oriented contents (not surprisingly in a chiefly astronomical context), immersive art forms, as well as entertaining and mind-altering movies. Young producers and novices met professionals and old hands on an equal footing. Exchange of experience over a glass of beer is a standard ingredient of Jena's FullDome Festival just as well as the festive Gala at which the internationally coveted »Janus« trophy is awarded to the best festival contributions entered.

Première of Kometentanz

The eve of the festival saw a rousing lead-up with the world première of Paul Scheerbart's »Kometentanz« (dance of comets, in the author's words, an "astral pantomime in two acts"), directed by Festival Director and Bauhaus University lecturer Prof. Micky Remann. Scheerbart's fantastic text written in 1903 was considered unactable since Richard Strauss and Gustav Mahler, balking at the daring spirit of Scheerbart's libretto, declined the offer to set it to music. What then seemed impossible has finally, more than hundred years later, been achieved by the digital fulldome projection theater, an instrument Scheerbart possibly anticipated at his time. With a bold synthesis of digital projection, sound design, choreographic and performance elements, the comets' dance was staged in a modern fashion. Twenty performers, among them the ZoManer theater troupe and the Vainno dance duo, mimed and danced to music by Ludger Nowak, Michael Holz and Rodrigo



Diaz, interacting live with projected fulldome imagery designed by Florian Meyer, André Wünscher and students of the media department of the Weimar Bauhaus University. A brilliant multimedia performance, the feature had to be repeated to an enthusiastic audience on Sunday after the festival.

The Workshops and SAT Skype conference

The morning hours of the three festival days were devoted to various workshops and presentations on fulldome topics. With a high share of international attendance, participants demonstrated and discussed issues and solutions of media design, quality standards, technical developments, interactive applications, and the efficient use of sound applications. A Skype conference with the Symposium ix of the Société des arts technologiques [SAT] held simultaneously in Montreal informed about the founding of the »International Fulldome Arts Alliance«. Dan Neafus for IMERSA (Immersive Media Entertainment Research Science and Art) and Micky Remann for the FullDome Festival, both in Jena, welcomed the initiative and agreed to join the new organization as charter members. The benefit of this networking for the international fulldome family is obvious.

The Full-length feature shows

As in the previous year, 21 contributions had been accepted for the first category, viz. thematic fulldome shows. The number of commercialized fulldome shows lasting between about 20 and 50 minutes has been increasing from year to year. Therefore, the FullDome Festival had to restrict entries to productions not older than one year, compared to two years before. Nevertheless, not all applications made it into the festival program, given the current abundance of fulldome productions. Criteria for the Festival Directors' decision for or against nomination were quality standards and thematic as well as technical advancements. The contributions evidence the grown diversity of fulldome topics. The movies also prove that, also in the eighth year of the festival, the quality of the commercial productions still varies greatly. The differences are not all due to the production budget.



What is striking is the quest for suitable recording techniques for fulldome videos, with the technical capabilities not yet coming up to the level of computer-generated movies. The narrative realization of many fulldome shows is still largely oriented towards classical planetarium presentations. Unlike these, fulldome offers the chance to pack a subject into stories and narrate them in an entertaining and fascinating manner by dramaturgical means without losing sight of the educational aspect. Some shows reveal that new producers took the plunge into the fulldome arena for the first time and need to gather more experience.

About half of the shows can no longer be associated with the classical theme fields of planetariums. They bear witness to the fact that the fulldome medium is, or at least can be, a significant enrichment for planetariums. »Breath of Life«, a production from Brazil dealing with the origin of life, »Beyond the Arctic Circle« from Lithuania about the fauna in arctic regions, and »Harmonielehre« from Canada, an attempt at visualizing music, are examples for the broadening of thematic horizons.

Topics in astronomy and space travel, too, are getting more varied, tend to refrain from abstract illustrations, and increasingly integrate worlds of practical experience of their consumers. »Adrenalin Universe« by the Planetarium of Ostrava, Czech Republic, although with imperfections as to craft skills, employs live action to address the subject of gravitation and attract the attention of the generation of young adults. The winner of the Directors' Award and a Janus, »Back to the Moon for Good« produced by Google Lunar XPRIZE and the National Space Centre Creative in Leicester, includes interviews and imagery of contesting teams participating in the space project and manages to raise the viewers' emotion and enthusiasm about the contest. The easily understandable script and its visual implementation in an extremely skilful combination of fulldome video, 3D graphics and classical visual components convinced the Festival Directors. The prize also honors the private enterprise commissioned with the production.

Suited to children, entertaining for adults and in delightful 3D animation, the little dragon Tabaluga in the show of the same name is in search of time. This new show for children



was created after an idea of, and with songs by, German rock star Peter Maffay. What convinced the Festival Directors was not only the uniqueness of combining a fact-finding topic – What is time? Where does it come from? Can you buy it? – with rock music and storytelling, but also that »Tabaluga«, produced by „the content dome“ in Hamburg, illustrates from the first to the last sequence what distinguishes the fulldome medium: the complete audiovisual involvement of the audience. This earned the show a Directors' Award plus a Janus.

With »Dark Universe«, the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History in New York gained an Honorable Mention for the excellent visualization of modern scientific data. The show takes up the strange phenomenon of red shift, illustrating it by means of 3D animations, and elucidates how the cosmic expansion affects the event horizon so that we cannot observe the entire universe.

Short films advancing

The FullDome Festival 2014 saw its biggest increase in the category of short films. It took two evenings this time to present the 49 contributions, each between barely two and fifteen minutes long. Whereas with feature films the main interest is on their commercial utilization, the opposite is true for the short films. A considerable share of them are made specifically for occasions like the Jena FullDome Festival. Some are created by students and lecturers; others take up individual ideas and implement them with eagerness to experiment and cheerful naivety. There is a great diversity of subjects and means, ranging from real film shots for dome projection to the informal visualization of music.

The Society of Arts and Technology submitted a number of art projects created for their own dome in Montreal. For the first time, Russian art films featured notably. »Gopal, Prince of the Cows' Planet« and »Himalayan Dreams«, both produced by Fulldome.Lab, ranked prominently with the Jena audience. The team of NSC Creative won one of the five Honorable Mentions of the festivals for »Tomorrow Town«, a production commissioned by Schindler Ltd., once more confirming its status as a top-rank fulldome factory. The film



shows concepts of future urban development and appropriate passenger transportation systems.

The second Honorable Mention for a short film was earned by Ralph Heinsohn. The designer from Hamburg, who had won an award already at last year's FullDome Festival, contributed »Frida und der Wald« (Frida and the forest), an entertaining piece for children. Frida, an engagingly animated toy caterpillar made of oak, narrates about its origin and the importance of trees and forest. A film that is hoped to supplement the children's programs of many planetariums.

The third Honorable Mention for a short film went to Finland. Stylistically, »Kilpisjärvellä« by Mark Lwoff and Misha Jaari from Helsinki represents a new low key type of fulldome film. The authors narrate their film in a deliberately restrained language to show what it means for two cameramen to rove the tundra in order to shoot polar lights. They have to work hard to weather the vicissitudes of everyday life among snow and ice. The film accompanies them and lets the audience experience the reward of their exertions.

The winner of the »Altered Mind Award« sponsored by Marcus Beyr and the Sphere of Light Award with a prize money of 500 Euro is another short film: »Echolocation«, a coproduction by André Wünschler (Develtainment), Lawrence Curtis (CATACEA, Curtis Films Inc.), Mark Fischer (Aguasonic) and Micky Remann (Liquid Sound), takes the audience to the submarine realm. In a sensuous mix of animated sub aqua scenes, visualized whale songs and real dolphin shots in water flooded with light, viewers feel transported to another world – a world emanating calm and energy. With the award, the international jury paid tribute to the film addressing an issue that is but inadequately described by the conventional term of environmental projection.

The Students' Night

In 2014 again, no doubt, the »Students' Night« was a highlight of the FullDome Festival. Although the number of entries fell short of the abundance in previous years, the student contributions did not lack in diversity and mastery. Student productions from the US



(Ringling College of Art), China (Tongji University), Poland (Torun University) and Lithuania (Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre) made it into the festival program besides contributions from the seasoned German universities in Weimar, Potsdam, Offenbach, Darmstadt and Braunschweig.

The jury, comprising German media experts and fulldome specialists from the US and Italy, had the demanding task of selecting the winners of the »Creative Award« and the »Performance Award«. They unanimously conferred the former on Tim Seger's »BEAT« (Offenbach University of Art and Design). Transported from the dull daily grind into a dream world, the film's protagonist shakes off his restraints under the experience of rhythm and beat.

The jury's decision regarding the Performance Award was unanimous, too. Flávio Bezerra, Eduard Tucholke and Laura Saenger of the Braunschweig University of Arts, with collaboration by Sascha Kriegel (Wolfsburg Planetarium), earned a Janus with their »Um Menino«, a lavish, excellently staged production. Um Menino, a Brazilian street boy gets lost in a dream world of circus and acrobats. The many actors interact with the virtual dream world to music by the Brazilian band »Chimpanzés de Gaveta«. Creative and Performance Awards include prize moneys of 500 Euro each, donated by ZEISS. The same applies to the »Audience Award« exclusively intended for a student contribution. By a majority vote of the audience at the FullDome Festival Gala, that Janus was awarded to Robert Becker of the Potsdam University of Applied Science for »Die Wundertrommel« (The wonder drum). A giant zoetrope drum, hoisted into the dome and made to rotate, simulates the first moving pictures. The festival attendees rewarded the idea of the medium acting in the medium, together with the effective implementation.

Stirring up emotions, arousing enthusiasm, making us share fear, pity and joy is the quotidian business of the movie industry. In the fulldome medium, this most deeply human component is still less distinct. Musia Heike Bus, sponsor of the »Emphasis on Emotion Award«, has made it her concern to promote films that draw their strength from the ingredient of emotions. The majority of the jurors voted for the Chinese animation



»Nightmare« by Tingwen Liao, Ziqi Peng, Qing Wang, Baining Ku and Cheng Gu. The award, a Janus with 500 Euro in prize money, is on the way to the Tongji University in Shanghai.

Spatial Sound Productions

For the second time, entrants in all categories of the FullDome Festival had the option to compete for a »Spatial Sound Award«. The surround-sound system at the Jena Planetarium permits 3D sound effects, which competitors were asked to design, whether with images or without. Sound production, a matter of exactly positioning the sound sources in 24 channels, is quite a challenge for the artists. The two awards, which come with a pair of upmarket headphones each donated by Shure, were won by Stefan Berke and Jan Zehn (Ten Art Communications Jena) with »From the Jungle to the Stars«, and Christian Öhl and Philipp Boß, students at the Offenbach and Darmstadt universities, respectively, with »Handmade«.

Thanks to all sponsors

The international FullDome Festival is made possible not least by many sponsors in industry and other partners. The organizers wish to express their heartfelt thanks to all donors and sponsors for their commitment to the advancement of a medium the promising potential of which deserves further exploration.